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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of parallel lessons in listening and silent reading was compared to a traditional basal approach to reading comprehension skills instruction. One hundred seventy-four fifth graders from sixteen randomly selected classrooms were divided into experimental and control groups. A pretest on four measures of comprehension was administered to all subjects. Treatment for the experimental group consisted of 14 weeks of intensive listening/reading transfer lessons in place of the normal basal instruction. Control groups received only the traditional basal instruction included within the scope and sequence of the teacher's manual. No significant differences existed between groups on the subtest for reading for information. However, significant differences were found on the subtests for reading for relationships, reading for interpretation, and reading for appreciation. Thus, the results showed that including a listening/reading transfer supplement to basal reading activities can positively affect the so-called upper levels of reading comprehension. (Author/RL)

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THE EFFECTS OF LISTENING/READING TRANSFER ON FOUR MEASURES OF READING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

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ON FOUR MEASURES OF READING COMPREHENSION

This study sought to compare the effectiveness of parallel lessons in listening and silent reading to a traditional basal approach to comprehension skills instruction. One hundred seventy-four fifth graders from sixteen randomly selected classrooms were divided into experimental or control groups. A pre-test on four measures of comprehension was administered to all subjects. Treatment for the experimental group consisted of fourteen weeks of intensive listening/reading transfer lessons in place of the normal basal instruction. Control groups received only the traditional basal instruction included within the scope and sequence of the teacher's manual. The results indicated that while experimental subjects scored higher on all tests of reading comprehension, significant differences were achieved on the three subtests dealing with the higher order comprehension skills of relationships, interpretation, and appreciation.

THE EFFECTS OF LISTENING/READING TRANSFER
ON FOUR MEASURES OF READING COMPREHENSION

During the past two decades, the schools of this country have reacted sharply to the demands of society to "teach more and teach it earlier." In order to accommodate this demand, teachers in the elementary grades have tended to overemphasize the word identification component of the reading process. This focus has produced a predictable outcome. Nationwide, standardized test results have shown an increase in word identification scores, but a decrease in comprehension scores (4). Faced with the realization that children can often "decode the words with limited understanding of their meaning," teachers are seeking more effective instructional strategies to improve comprehension.

One such strategy offered by Cunningham (3) suggests a listening/reading transfer method in which students learn that the types of activities they are able to do after listening to a passage are the same types of activities they are requested to do after reading a passage. To facilitate the transfer of comprehension skills, two parallel lessons are designed by the teacher. In the first, the students listen and respond in specific ways, e.g. determining the main idea, organization of ideas, inferring cause and effect, etc. Immediately following, a similar selection is read and responded to in the same manner. Each lesson includes six steps which are to be performed in order, although the format of the exercises can and should

be varied. A sample lesson on stating the main idea of a story (taken from Cunningham) will illustrate this procedure:

1) Set the purpose for listening. "There are three sentences on the board. All are about things that happen in the story I am about to read to you. As you listen, try to decide which sentence tells the main idea of this story--the most important idea. Try to choose the sentence you would tell someone if they asked you what the story was all about."
2) Read the selection to the children.
3) Have the children volunteer choices for main idea; have them explain why that choice seems to tell what the story is mainly about and why the others do not.
4) Give the children mimeographed sheets with three sentences and a story and tell them to read to determine which of the sentences tells the main idea.
5) Children read and choose the main idea.
6) Children share their choices and the explanation for the choices as a whole class or in small groups.

According to Cunningham, three underlying principles are essential for the success of this approach. First, students are asked to do the same thing while reading as they had previously done while listening, and that they realize the similarity of the two processes. Second, the teacher must establish definite purposes for listening and reading. Finally, it is necessary to get the children to verbalize how they arrived at a certain answer. Through such probing and

explanation, children who cannot comprehend will be able to observe the inner workings of those who can.

Purpose

The present study sought to compare the effectiveness of parallel lessons in listening and silent reading to a traditional basal approach to comprehension skills instruction. One hundred and seventy-four fifth graders from sixteen randomly selected classrooms in a large midwestern suburban school district participated in the project. Eight classrooms (N = 91) served as an experimental group while the remaining eight (N = 83) served as controls. The lowest level reading section of each class (those who can usually decode but cannot understand what they have read) constituted the treatment/non-treatment sample. All students had achieved a minimum of one year below grade level on the reading subtest of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. No significant difference between the experimental and the control groups was found when a two-tailed t-test was performed on mean I. Q. scores.

Procedure

Prior to the initiation of the experiment, a one day in-service workshop was held for teachers, supervisors, and reading specialist monitors. At that time procedures were explained, techniques defined and practiced, and lessons planned. After the orientation period, all subjects were pre-tested with Form A of the New Developmental Reading Tests (1). This test which evaluates literal and creative comprehension has an alternate form reliability of .89 and an internal

consistency reliability of .94. *t*-tests of group means indicated that no significant differences existed between groups on the four subtests under examination. A fourteen week teach/non-teach period was then begun. In lieu of the normal basal instruction, the experimental group received one listening/reading transfer lesson per daily reading session utilizing materials from a supplementary basal series. Control groups received only the traditional basal instruction which adhered to the scope and sequence of the teacher's manual. The time devoted to reading instruction within the framework of a language arts block was equivalent for both groups. Although the experimental teachers followed the six steps of the listening/reading transfer method and emphasized the underlying principles, the activities in the lesson plans were individually conceived and independently constructed. During the seventy teaching sessions equal time was allotted to the comprehension abilities of recognizing the main idea, recalling stated details, recalling sequence of events, sensing relationships among ideas, recognizing cause/effect relationships, inferring main idea, predicting conclusions and outcomes, understanding the implications of stated ideas, understanding characterization, and sensing the tone of the selection. At the conclusion of the training period, all students were post-tested using Form B of the N.D.R.T. Reading supervisors spent four to six hours weekly observing classroom proceedings to ensure that guidelines were being followed.

Materials

Subtests II, III, IV, and V of Forms A and B of the New Developmental Reading Tests for the Intermediate Grades (4, 5, 6) were used for pre- and post-test measures. The pupil behavior domains sampled by the test items in each of the four parts are: II. Reading for Information-recall specific terms, note important details of information stated, recognize fundamental concepts, use the facts to answer specific questions; III. Reading for Relationships-sense relationships among ideas, note ideas which do or do not belong in a group, note the order of occurrence; IV. Reading for Interpretation-recognize the importance of each concept, weigh the relative importance of ideas, derive inferences, conclusions, and predictions, understand the implications of stated ideas; V. Reading for Appreciation-sense the feeling tone, grasp the sensory impression, note the motivations of characters.

Selections for the listening component of the lesson plan were taken from the students' supplementary basal series, The Houghton Mifflin readers. The choice of material read to the children was based on considerations of length and purpose. Passages had to be short since the audience would be listening intently, and they had to lend themselves to the purposes set for the lesson, i.e. sequencing, cause/effect, etc. Reading selections were segments of basal stories being covered in class. The New MacMillan Reading Program served this purpose. Again, portions chosen accentuated the comprehension skills being taught.

Results

The data were analyzed using two-tailed t-tests to determine the significance of the differences ($p = .05$) between group mean gains on four subtests of the comprehension instrument. No significant differences existed between groups on Subtest II, Reading for Information ($t = 1.22$, $p > .05$). However, significant differences were found on Subtest III, Reading for Relationships ($t = 2.16$, $p < .05$), Subtest IV, Reading for Interpretation ($t = 12.17$, $p < .001$), and Subtest V, Reading for Appreciation ($t = 8.91$, $p < .001$). Table 1 summarizes these findings.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-test Values for Experimental (1) and Control (2) Groups

		M	SD	t value	d.f.	p
Gain II	1	7.25	3.66	1.22	172	n.s.
	2	6.64	2.95			
Gain III	1	7.03	2.96	2.16	172	<.05
	2	6.16	2.37			
Gain IV	1	8.69	2.37	12.17	172	<.001
	2	5.06	1.51			
Gain V	1	7.64	1.90	8.91	172	<.001
	2	5.22	1.66			

Conclusions

There is at present little research that shows that activities such as the listening/reading transfer lesson will lead directly to gains in reading comprehension. However, like other response specificity techniques (SQ3R, Guided Reading Procedure, USSR), the listening/reading transfer lesson appears to be based on accepted theory and rooted in logic. It seems reasonable that reading with a purpose is more efficient and productive than reading without one. Students who read for specified reasons will be thinking as they are reading and not merely receiving information they are supposed to consume. The traditional basal reader format directs the teacher to introduce concepts and the vocabulary of a selection, and then, after children have read the story, to ask questions. The intent of this post questioning is to direct the students' attention to what they should have been looking for as they read. By setting purposes prior to reading, children are taught how to apply and extend their mental abilities as strategies for developing comprehension skills. Similarly, the listening component of the lesson functions as an illustrative, concrete example of the skill that is to be utilized during reading. Since elementary school children can usually understand more when a passage is read to them than when they read it themselves, the combined employment of the auditory and visual modalities should enhance learning.

The results of this study indicate that including a listening/reading transfer supplement to basal reading activities can positively

affect the so-called upper levels of comprehension. Since both groups in the study fared equally well on a test of reading for literal information, this may imply adequate treatment in this area by basal reading programs and lesser emphasis on relationships, interpretation, and appreciation of material read. These findings tend to affirm Cazden's (2) and Smith and Barrett's (5) recommendation that teachers must be aware of and consciously direct classroom activities toward developing higher level comprehension skills and less upon the memorization of endless factual information.

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